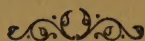


TEA CEREMONY

One of the Esthetic Arts of Japan



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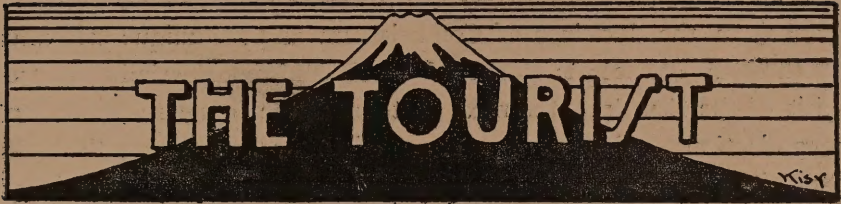
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TEA CEREMONY

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VISITORS to Japan often desire to witness *chanoyu* or tea-ceremony—at least once. Those who visit the picturesque Ginkakuji (the Silver Pavilion), on the outskirts of Kyoto, will find, in its precincts, an old but elegant house and will be told that in that house is the oldest existing tea-ceremony room in Japan. Some knowledge of this institution peculiar to Japan will enhance the enjoyment when seeing this beautiful historic monument.

Chanoyu is one of those ceremonies which played a great rôle in the history of Japanese culture.

The original spirit of the art of the tea ceremony is based on contentedness and quietude and the principles of courtesy and decency. The fundamental idea is social justification, the rich and the poor well judging of their circumstances and allotments and avoiding either extravagance or parsimony. The wealthy and noble may use at their tea-party priceless treasures, but we should not consider this merely as indulgence in luxury, but should regard it as the host's effort to entertain his visitors with the utmost respect, and not the least self-conceit or haughtiness should be implied on his part.

The courtesy and moral sense in the tea-ceremony are derived from the doctrines of Confucianism and the unique principle of the tea services is grounded on Buddhism, especially on the spirit of the Zen Sect, the most abstruse of the Japanese Buddhism denominations. Toward the close of the 15th century, the cult found its promoter in the dilettante Yoshimasa, the 8th military ruler of the Ashikaga house, who, weary of statecraft, retired in 1482 to the Silver Pavilion, above referred to, to immerse himself in the esthetic arts and cults in companionship with the masters of his day. Among those were Shuko and Soami, who, with Yoshimasa, built the said Silver Pavilion and the tea-ceremony house. Later in the 16th century there lived Sen-no-Rikyu, the greatest exponent of the cult, who enjoyed the patronage of Oda



Handling a tea-bowl

Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the two great military rulers and ardent lovers of the tea-ceremony.

There is no doubt that, during those stirring and turbulent times, the cult, of which the principle was to rule one's own mind and establish a refined mutual good feeling, exercised a great influence on the hearts of men. Sen-no-Rikyu instituted and brought the formalities of the tea-ceremony to such perfection that his principles were handed down by his followers through ages and even to this day. From his day down to the Tokugawa Shogunate the tea-ceremony was a pastime universally enjoyed by aristocratic and wealthy people. It was a matter of hospitality among friends and acquaintances, and daimyo, feudal lords, used it as a means of testing the culture of their retainers.

Then came the Restoration of Meiji, and for some time following it the ceremony was practised almost exclusively by

wealthy people. Later on, however, it was revived first as a training in etiquette for maidens of the upper class, next pursued more widely among the common people as an esthetic cult. Nowadays most girls' high schools have tea-ceremony as a subject of study in the curriculum, and it is generally believed to contribute to mental culture and to the preservation of the spirit uniquely Japanese. There are various schools of *chanoyu* to-day, each differing more or less from the others in its technique. Among them the most famous are, Omote (front)-Senké, Ura (rear)-Senké and Senké-Mushakoji-ryu, the three schools descending from Sen-no-Rikyu, the old master of this elegant accomplishment.

There are two forms of tea-ceremony. one is called "Shoin-Shiki", or formal, and the other, "Soan-Shiki" or simple.

The former is an original performance, and it ought to be performed in a room of four and a half mats or more, namely, of six, eight or ten mats, and in a rather larger room than usual, decorated with a stand and shelves, and tea is made under rigid and solemn regulations. "Soan-Shiki" is performed in a smaller



Pouring hot water into the tea-bowl from the kettle placed
on the hearth

than four and a half mats and often in a room of two, three, or four mats. In this case there is no stand or shelf, but tea is simply made under abbreviated rules.

Chanoyu, when carried out in its full formality, is the most intricate ceremony. There are exact and elaborate rules to be observed. After receipt of the invitation, the guest must appear in the appointed tea-ceremony house in perfectly clean attire. He must wear ceremonial clothes and a new pair of *tabi* and carry with him a white paper fan.

The *sukiya*, the edifice for tea ceremonials, consists of the tea-room proper, an anteroom (*midzuya*) where the tea utensils are washed and arranged before being brought in, a portico (*machiai*) in which the guests wait until they receive the summons to enter the tea-room and a garden path (*roji*) which connects the *machiai* with the tea-room. It is smaller than the smallest of Japanese dwelling-houses, while the materials used in its construction are intended to give the suggestion of refined poverty. Yet, this is the result of profound artistic forethought, and the details are worked out with care.

The *roji*, the garden path which leads from the *machiai* to the tea-room, signifies the first stage of meditation,—the passage into self-illumination. The *roji* was intended to break connection with the outside world and to produce a fresh sensation conducive to the full enjoyment of æstheticism in the tea-room itself. Thus mentally prepared, the guest will silently approach the sanctuary, and, in the good old days, a *samurai* had to leave his swords on the rack beneath the eaves, the tea-room being pre-eminently a house of peace. Then, he will bend low and creep into the room through a small door not more than three feet in height. This proceeding is incumbent on all guests—high and low alike,—and is intended to inculcate humility.

However faded the tea-room and the tea equipage may seem, everything is absolutely clean. Not a particle of dust will be found in the darkest corner. A piece of an antique metal work must not be attacked with the unscrupulous zeal of the Dutch housewife, as there is beauty in the gray which has come with age. Dripping water from a flower vase need not be wiped away, for in the hot season it may be promotive of quiet pleasure derived from the suggestion of dew and coolness.



Tea-ceremony room with hostess and guests

The tea-room is absolutely empty except for what may be placed there temporarily to satisfy the æsthetic mind. Some special art object is brought in for the occasion, and everything else is selected and arranged to enhance the beauty of the principal attraction. In the tea-room repetition is scrupulously avoided. The various objects for the decoration of a room should be so selected that no colour or design shall be repeated. If you have a living flower, a painting of flowers is not allowable. In placing a vase or an incense burner in the alcove (*tokonoma*), care should be taken not to put it in the exact centre, as, by dividing the space into equal halves, it would spoil the beauty of irregularity.

The simplicity of the tea-room and its freedom from vulgarity make it truly a sanctuary from the turmoil of the outer world. There and there alone can a man consecrate himself to undisturbed adoration of the beautiful.

When the guests arrive at the house, they first enter the waiting-room in the garden and wait sitting on the bamboo benches there. In front of the waiting-room there is placed a stone basin, in appearance resembling a round hand-mill, about one metre in diameter, filled to the brim with pure water. Then one of the host's children appears holding up a bamboo

ladle, also filled with water, and approaching pours it into the basin, so that the surface swells and the water overflows. This is done by way of silently expressing a hearty welcome.

Then the guests are conducted into the tea-room. They enter the room by the small entrance in single file, the relative order being previously decided. Then they have a ceremonial appreciation of the hanging scroll on the alcove wall and the utensils to be used at the ceremony. This finished, the sliding screen called *fusuma* is opened and the host enters and exchanges greetings with the guests. The maximum number of guests is five, four sitting in a row, and the fifth at right angles to the rest. The



A set of tea-ceremony utensils and accessories: left to right, waste-water receptacle, tea-whisk and-caddy, water jar, tea kettle, etc.

host sits facing the row, near the square hearth, which is fitted into the floor at one corner of the half mat in the centre of the room and on which is placed an iron kettle for boiling water.

Before they proceed to the regular course of tea-ceremony, several things are to be done according to the complicated rules—the sprinkling of

pure ashes in the hearth, the replenishing of the fire with charcoal, and the burning of incense.

Meanwhile the water in the kettle begins to boil, and the tea-ceremony proper is begun. The host brings in the utensils: first the water-jar, secondly the tea-caddy and the tea-bowl within which is placed the tea-whisk, a white piece of hemp-cloth and a bamboo spoon, and thirdly the small bamboo ladle, the *futaoki* (bamboo utensil in which the kettle lid is to be placed) and the waste-water receptacle. All prepared, the host performs the ceremony of *fukusa-sabaki*, the wiping of all the utensils with a

piece of thick and heavy silk cloth called "fukusa", the colour of which is purple or crimson. Then he proceeds with the preparation of tea. First, two or three spoonfuls of powdered tea are put in the bowl and the boiling water is poured into it, and the infusion is beaten to a froth. When mixture is complete, the host places the bowl before the guest at the head of the row, who takes three sips and a half and, wiping the brim carefully, sets the bowl midway between himself and the next guest, who, bowing to his fellow guests, draws it towards him. He also sips and passes the bowl to his neighbour and so on to the last guest, who drains the contents. This concludes the preliminary circulation. The host then makes tea again in a bowl for the first guest, who drains it in three sips and a half and returns it to the host. The host makes a fresh bowl of tea for the second guest and so on to the last. There are a *koicha* (thick tea) course and an *usucha* (thin tea) course, one of which is taken up according to the school to which the host belongs.

This is an outline of the tea-ceremony. Its complexity lies in the strictly prescribed formulas, which must be observed in the arrangement of the room, in handling the utensils, in the way in which the tea should be drunk. When and how the utensils should be taken up and admired, the hanging scroll and flower-arrangement should be praised—these are all prescribed and scrupulously observed as dictates of refined taste. Every movement should be at once deliberate and delicate. The result is that tea-ceremony imparts to its votaries not only gracefulness of behaviour, but also that precious mental composure and placid, harmonious spirit, which are believed to be characteristic of a cultured Japanese.



